



Ryan Cote, 8, of Pembroke, gives his father, Tech. Sgt. Jeff Cote, a tearful hug goodbye at the gathering for 157th Air Wing personnel.

Photo by [Jamie Cohen](#)

Tearful farewells: 157th Airmen Deploying to Iraq

By Chris Outcalt

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PORTSMOUTH -- Senior Airman Andrew Freisinger of the Pease Air National Guard Base volunteered to go to Iraq. He wants to be a part of the mission because he trusts his training and the people around him. And the way he sees it, it's an opportunity to serve his country.

"There are good days and bad days, just like any job," said Freisinger, who lives in Dover. "But I'm excited to do what it is I know and what I've been trained to do."

Freisinger, who was stationed overseas for three months last year, was one of 13 senior airmen who gathered at the base Sunday for a farewell with family and friends before being deployed to Iraq today.

The Guard members are scheduled to be gone for seven months and will assist with base security while in Iraq.



Katelyn Faucher rests her head on the shoulder of her boyfriend, Senior Airman

Jared Booth.

Photo by [Jamie Cohen](#)

Although Freisinger's sister, Donna Kanniff, has watched her brother leave the country once before as a member of the military, this time it's different -- she knows he's going to a war zone.

"We're going to try and keep things as normal as possible," said Kanniff, who traveled from Vermont to see her brother. "But we're certainly going to miss him."

Kanniff lives near a woman whose husband is serving overseas, and said her situation has opened their eyes to some of the stresses that can be caused by having a loved one in Iraq.

"We've seen what she's been going through and it's been tough," said Kanniff, who has set up an e-mail account for her brother so they can communicate.

Freisinger's mother also attended the gathering to see her son before he's deployed.

Although she's sad to see him go, she takes comfort in the confidence he's acquired during his time with the Air National Guard.

"He's gained so much strength and character," Linda Kearns said. "And he's going with so many other strong people."

Col. Richard Martell, commander of the 157th Air Wing, formally addressed the troops during the brief ceremony Sunday.

"I'm humbled to stand in front you," Martell said. "You certainly deserve all of our appreciation."

Martell also addressed the families and friends of the airmen who attended.

"I thank you and I know that's not sufficient," he said. "But I want to let you know that this base will support you in any way that it can."

Martell urged families to attend monthly meetings held on the grounds of the base, where officials will be able to answer any questions they might have. During the meetings, family will be eligible to receive special security briefings that will include information on exactly what work their loved ones are conducting.

"Please let us take care of you," Martell said.

In addition to the 13 troops leaving for Iraq, there are also 15 troops slated to leave Aug. 28 for Diego Garcia, a small island in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

For Senior Airman Randy Gagnon, the trip to the small island will be his first outside of the country as a member of the military.

Gagnon said he will continue his training for the next two weeks to prepare for his departure.

"The more training, the better," said Gagnon, who hails from Nashua. "I'm excited, and it makes it easier knowing that I'm going with some good people who will support me in any way they can."